



FRANCE

United Nations Democracy Fund

**International Day of Democracy
15 September 2008**

**Statement delivered by par H.E. Mr. Jean-Maurice RIPERT,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations**

Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Mr. Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Partnerships,
Mr. Executive Director of the United Nations Democracy Fund,
Mr. Chair of the Advisory Board of the United Nations Democracy Fund,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To begin, I would like to emphasize the strong message that this first International Day of Democracy sends out.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Day of Democracy is indeed a special time to recall that all peoples, regardless of cultural exception or specificity, are sensitive to the democratic ideal. Neither history, tradition, religion nor any cultural identity should deny a people the right to a democratic system of government. Democracy is a legitimate aspiration, and it is our attachment to this common aspiration that we are solemnly reaffirming today.

There are several paths that lead toward democracy and more than one conception of it. However, for all peoples, democracy is the fruit of a process which is often long and sometimes tumultuous. The international community must lend its support to the efforts of North-Koreans, Burmese, Zimbabweans or other peoples around the world so that they can contribute to laying or restoring the foundations of democracy in their own countries.

As the Secretary-General stressed it this morning, helping countries down the path towards democracy is indeed one of the main missions of the United Nations.

It is also because democracy is a factor for peace, security and development, as the General Assembly affirmed at the 2005 World Summit, that the United Nations must help foster it.

Even if democracy is indeed a form of political organization, it would be an over-simplification to reduce it to its formal aspect such as holding free and fair elections. Democracy presupposes that there is a room in society for the free expression of citizens, for freedom of religion and belief and for conflicting ideas. Democracy requires respecting human rights and protecting fundamental freedoms. This includes respecting economic, social and cultural rights, as well as achieving gender equality.

France is determined to encourage and support all United Nations initiatives aimed at promoting these democratic principles.

This is why France has both financially and strategically supported the United Nations Democracy Fund. France has been on the Advisory Board of the UNDEF since its inception and within this framework champions the Fund's ambitious vision. Aside from France's direct financial contributions, it also sponsors a Young Professional Programme position at the UNDEF.

France considers that the United Nations Democracy Fund plays a crucial role in helping the United Nations further democracy. As well as being entirely dedicated to this cause, it is unique in that it finances civil society projects. The UNDEF's steadfast determination with regard to civil society projects is what ensures its success.

France has always been convinced that the UNDEF would be a success. I wish to acknowledge the personal commitment of the Secretary-General in this regard and to congratulate the Executive Director of UNDEF and his staff for their achievements.

It must, however, be acknowledged that the UNDEF's financial resources are limited. Only thirty five countries make donations to the Fund, which is a low compared to other UN Funds, particularly in view of the high demand for democratic assistance. It is therefore essential to increase the number of donors.

While it is the UN's responsibility to promote democracy, on this International Day of Democracy, we should salute the role played by countries and regional organizations in support of the UN.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate, during the current French Presidency of the European Union, the EU Member States' strong commitment to democracy within the United Nations.

Of the 35 countries that contribute to the UNDEF, 15 are EU members, three of which (France, Germany and Romania) sit on the Advisory Board.

The European Union has a comprehensive instrument at its disposal for promoting democracy: the *European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)*, created in 1994. It has a large annual budget of 130 million euros and enables concrete actions for democracy to be financed, particularly civil society projects.

France believes that long-term plans should provide for closer cooperation between regional initiatives and the UNDEF.

Mr. Secretary-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would once again like to express France's unflagging support for the UNDEF. Democracy belongs to all humanity, and is very probably our greatest achievement. It is essential to have an organization like the UNDEF to bolster democracy, and this International Day to remind us of just how precious democracy is.

Thank you very much.